
Maine Commission for Community Service Grant Making Policies, Guidelines, and Procedures

Background

As part of its statutory mission the Maine Commission for Community Service has the responsibility for granting Maine's allocation of funds for national community service programs (AmeriCorps*State, Martin Luther King Day, Special Initiatives, and Community-based Learn and Serve America K-12) from the Corporation for National and Community Service.

The Commission first developed this Grant Making Policy document in July 1997. They made subsequent revisions in September 1999, October 2002, September 2005, and June 2008. Some policies are relevant for any grant-making activity undertaken by the Commission. Others specifically refer to AmeriCorps or National Service grant programs.

In 2005 the Corporation for National and Community Service developed new rules for each National Service grant program. These rules describe how award competitions will operate at the federal level. The federal statute also requires that States develop funding priorities and selection criteria. At the same time, the rules affirm that States may develop funding priorities, match requirements, sustainability requirements, and selection criteria that add to or complement the federal parameters. These areas of discretionary policy-making also allow States to integrate state procurement rules and laws. The Commission conducts its grant process in accordance with the State of Maine rules for procurement (Chapter 110).

The AmeriCorps rules also direct states to prioritize in rank-order any proposals submitted to the federal Competitive grant competition (45 CFR §2522.465).

The Corporation for National and Community Service provides general federal grant requirements. These are then integrated into the state government procurement requirements and Maine-specific policies contained in this document. This combined information forms the foundation for the MCCS grant application requirements, requests for proposals (or Notices of Funding Availability), submission requirements, and selection or award procedures.

General Grant Making Guidelines

As part of its Strategic Plan, the Commission for Community Service identifies priority activities and community issues to support through its grants. These guidelines will apply to all funding undertaken by the Commission unless the original source of the funds specifies other criteria. In cases where the funding source permits additional criteria, the MCCS will add its own funding priorities. The scoring criteria for each grant competition will be developed and published at the time of the competition.

Additional Considerations:

All applicants for grants from MCCS are expected to propose service activities that are:

- consistent with the vision and mission of the Commission;
- aligned with the sponsoring organization's mission;
- presented with the full commitment of the sponsor and the partnering entities;
- developed by a genuine, inclusive process that allowed the community to determine what solutions would meet the need identified;
- submitted by partners who share the Commission's belief in the value of community service and volunteer efforts;
- designed from the beginning to generate community volunteers, develop a local capacity to meet the identified need through volunteer service, and develop financial resources at a level which will ultimately sustain the activity without Commission grant funds.

The Commission will give priority [rev 2002] to those proposals that

- are submitted by a partnership or coalition [rev 2002] of local organizations;
- demonstrate that partners or coalition [rev 2002] members possess the skills needed to implement the project (fiscal, volunteer management, documentation, connection to customers, grant management).
- address a need identified as critical and unmet, through a genuine process of community-based needs assessment and project design, in the geographic area to be served;
- demonstrate a commitment to continuous quality improvement and achieving high quality results through development and implementation of a comprehensive evaluation plan that encompasses service activities, member development, community impact, and program development;
- contain a plan to involve non-national service volunteers in the core efforts of the project from the first year and integrate those volunteers in a manner which uses the essential practices in volunteer management;
- demonstrate inclusion of all segments of the community;
- outline a plan for sustainability beyond national service funding which has a reasonable expectation of being realized;
- are guided or advised by a group of citizens who represent the communities served and, in particular, citizens whose needs are being met by the project;
- outline a plan for making the community aware of the contributions the grant funds are making to address community needs and the role the Commission plays as funding and capacity building partner;
- include a projected budget for 3 years that reflects the Commission's match requirements.

AmeriCorps Specific Grant Making Policies

In accordance with the federal rules for AmeriCorps grants, the Corporation for National and Community Service establishes its own priorities for funding. These priorities apply to the AmeriCorps*State Competitive grant program or any special initiative. The Maine Commission for Community Service sets the funding priorities for the State Formula competition.

In each grant competition, the Commission proposes to underwrite more than one award. In the event that not enough applications are deemed adequate for funding, the Commission reserves the right to solicit other proposals.

All applicants for funds will submit projected annual budgets for years 2 and 3, as well as performance measures for the entire grant period when the grant will cover more than one year. The submitted three-year budget will determine the funding levels for all three years. Funds awarded in years 2 and 3 of a grant period may be increased or decreased by the Commission based on either performance or changes in the availability of federal resources.

Budget details on income sources must demonstrate a reasonable expectation that the local matching funds can be obtained from the community.

Grants are selected with sensitivity to geographic distribution of, not only the legal applicant, but also the local placement or host sites; however, geography will not be a weighted factor in making final awards.

In the case of AmeriCorps Formula monies, each award will support the equivalent of at least 10 full AmeriCorps Member Service Years.

The Commission will use AmeriCorps* State Formula monies to support three types of grants:

- a. Planning Grants: Awarded for up to one year at levels determined by the Commission in advance of each competition. The purpose of the Planning Grant is to support new applicants so that they can develop and design new operating AmeriCorps programs. Planning Grant recipients then compete for operating grants in the next available funding cycle.
- b. Education Award Grants: Awarded for administrative support to organizations that do not need operating funds but wish to have their volunteers qualify as AmeriCorps members and earn the educational award. Funding will be \$1,000 per Member Service Year (1,700 hours) equivalent.
- c. Operating Grants: Awarded to support programs for member costs and program operations in accordance with the match requirements of the grant. These grants must adhere to the rules and guidance about allowable costs established by the federal agency.

“New programs” are defined as one of the following:

- A proposal from a sponsoring organization that has not operated an AmeriCorps State grant program. [rev 2002]
- Replication of an AmeriCorps program model. For this purpose, replication means taking an existing program model and using it in a different setting with a different administrative structure. (Example: Taking a school-based program and replicating it in community centers or youth-serving agencies.)
- A proposal from an existing grant sponsor in which the experienced sponsoring organization desires to take what it learned in a previous AmeriCorps grant program and apply it to a new population or new geographic area. (Example: Using the lessons learned in a youth mentoring program to develop and implement a program that helps non-traditional college students reach their goals.)

Applicants with no experience in operating national service programs that seek multi-year program grants (e.g., AmeriCorps) will normally be required to apply for Planning Grants as their first step and as a way to increase the success of program operations during the start up year of a new AmeriCorps project. [rev 2002]

“Re-competing programs” are those that have previously received AmeriCorps grant funds from the Corporation for National and Community Service within the past five years.

Applicants experienced in operating national service programs who propose to implement new national service programs will be evaluated on their progress toward sustainability under the prior national service grant. The Commission’s “Expectations of Grantees” (adopted June 1998) contain the elements of sustainability used in evaluating the program.

Level of Match Required for AmeriCorps State Competitive and Formula funds granted through MCCS

The federal statute and subsequent rule contain minimum levels of match for the major budget sections.

The level of match outlined below pertains to the Grand Total for the entire budget and can be met by increasing the match beyond statutory requirements in either the Member Support or Operating sections of the budget.

The chart below reflects the match level revisions adopted by the Commission in June 2008.

<i>Grant Cycle</i>	<i>First Year</i>	<i>Second Year</i>	<i>Third Year</i>
Planning Grant	67% CNCS share 33% Local share [Revised 2002]	NA	NA
New Program First Operating Grant	70% CNCS share 30% Local match [Revised 2008]	70% CNCS share 30% Local match [Revised 2008]	70% CNCS share 30% Local match [Revised 2008]
First Re-compete Grant Second Operating Grant	60% CNCS share 40% Local match [Revised 2008]	60%CNCS share 40%Local match [Revised 2008]	60%CNCS share 40%Local match [Revised 2008]
Second Re-compete Grant Third Operating Grant	45%CNCS share 55%Local match [Revised 2008]	45% CNCS share 55%Local match [Revised 2008]	45% CNCS share 55%Local match [Revised 2008]
Third Re-compete Grant Fourth Operating Grant	1. Programs must apply under State*Competitive rules. 2. May apply for full Cost-per-Member allowed. 3. Match split changes to 40% CNCS share 60% Local match [Revised 2005]		

Expectations of Grantees

Adopted in 1998 by the Maine Commission for Community Service, the “Expectations of Grantees” grew out of a collaborative process. AmeriCorps programs directors and members of the Commission identified the key steps that a program needs to take to ensure the growth and success of a program as it moves from its first year of operation to the second and third years of a grant cycle.

YEAR ONE EXPECTATIONS: (no prior National Service experience)

- Implement personnel, fiscal, administrative, and reporting systems to achieve compliance with National Service grant provisions.
- Establish positive, effective working relationships with grant partners for effective service delivery.
- Accomplish the performance measurement objectives for community service, member development and community strengthening described for year one of the grant.
- Establish a recognized presence in the community through public education and outreach.
- Implement a basic continuous quality improvement system to monitor community satisfaction with service and program's ability to meet the identified need.
- Lay a solid foundation for sustainable service through periodic citizen involvement in service activities, timely documentation of local match, and development of a committee or advisory board that brings together the partners, service beneficiaries, and other stakeholders to guide program implementation.
- Catalogue lessons learned in the first year of operation and reflect them in proposed plans for year two.

YEAR TWO EXPECTATIONS:

- Demonstrate a commitment to quality service through staff development and strong working relationships with grant partners.
- Develop a business plan in collaboration with the advisory committee that diversifies and extends partnerships with service stakeholders (service beneficiaries, volunteers, funders, and service delivery collaborators).
- Assess the status of program volunteer management system and its ability to recruit as well as support increased citizen involvement in program's core service activities.
- Accomplish community service, member development, and community strengthening objectives in a manner that gives local volunteers a meaningful role, develops an ethic of service among members, reflects community feedback about service, coordinates with other national service programs, and provides specific evidence through evaluation that activities are having the intended effect.
- Demonstrate community support of program activities and local awareness of impact on community needs through community attention to, involvement in, and awareness of the program.
- Increase likelihood of sustainability through strengthened financial support that includes increased diversity in funding sources and early (by end of first quarter) written commitments of underwriters to provide match funds.
- Fully implement impact and quantitative evaluation and communicate the results to stakeholders and community members. Conduct an evaluation of program quality, impact, and operations that

addresses not only issues of interest to the program but also those issues identified by CNCS as its areas of evaluative interest.[rev 2002]

- Catalogue lessons learned in Year 2 and relate those lessons to both proposed Year 3 plans and future sustainability.

YEAR THREE EXPECTATIONS:

- In collaboration with the advisory body, implement the business plan and track progress against the plan and the grant objectives.
- Expand and/or enhance the non-AmeriCorps volunteer base to increase service capacity.
- Develop and implement a plan to strengthen the program's volunteer management system that reflects best professional practice in the volunteer field so that it is capable of supporting citizen involvement in core service work of the program.
- Operate an effective internal and external communication system that provides all stakeholders with information they need -- including evidence of program effectiveness and quality -- and educates potential partners or stakeholders.
- Demonstrate strong community ownership through significant involvement of citizens in service work, written commitments of funders to provide match on a scheduled basis each quarter, positive working relationships with media and stakeholders.

EXPECTATIONS OF RE-COMPETING AMERICORPS PROGRAMS:

Re-competing AmeriCorps programs that submit applications for subsequent grants will be required to:

- Engage in self-assessment of lessons learned, provide conclusions of evaluation and continuous quality improvement system, impact on community, opportunities to increase partnerships to meet community needs, and stakeholder opinions of local priorities in order to develop an action plan for the post-grant period
- Conduct an evaluation of program operations (administration, finance/budget, volunteer management, AmeriCorps member development, continuous improvement systems, etc.) and performance (the extent to which the program accomplishes its stated goals and objectives)
- Create a sustainability plan that outlines how the program will develop local capacity to continue service activities after AmeriCorps grant funding ends. MCCS staff will provide guidance and technical assistance on development of a sustainability plan. A sustainability plan will include targets for:
 - Developing and/or enhancing community partnerships (i.e., collaboration with other organizations on program planning and implementation)
 - Involving other community stakeholders on an advisory board, which allows broad-based community input on operation as well as future direction of the program. Stakeholders should include people who are benefiting from service provided by the program.
 - Diversifying revenue sources in order to reduce reliance on CNCS grant funds.
 - Building greater awareness for program activities through publicity and public relations.
 - Testing/monitoring continued relevance of program by periodically assessing the community needs and/or conditions that led to establishment of the program. [rev 2002]

Policies and Procedures for Scoring of AmeriCorps Grant Applications

[added 2005]

For AmeriCorps State Formula competitions, the Commission will use the same weighting as the Corporation for National and Community Service: Program Design, Organizational Capability, and Budget and Cost Effectiveness.

An impartial panel of peer reviewers will review and score each application for multi-year funding. They will also conduct interviews with each Formula applicant.

By consensus, the reviewers will rate the proposals and assign each proposal to one of the following categories:

- Strongly Recommend for Further Review (A comprehensive and thorough proposal of exceptional merit with numerous strengths; total score between 90 and 100)
- Recommend for Further Review (A proposal that demonstrates overall competence and is worthy of support; it has some weaknesses. Total score between 80 and 89)
- Recommend for Further Review with Hesitation (A proposal with strengths and weaknesses approximately equal. However, as a whole, the weaknesses are not offset by strengths. Total score between 60 and 79.)
- Do Not Recommend for Further Review (A proposal with serious shortcomings. There are numerous weaknesses and few strengths. Total score 59 or below)

Applications not recommended for further review will not continue in the process.

Applications recommended for some level of review by the Grants Selection and Performance Task Force will receive further assessment on the following issues:

- The strength of the proposal's alignment with the funding priorities and strategic plan of the Commission
- Problematic issues in the required attachments (audit, fiscal survey, projected budgets, projected income sources)
- Adequacy and completeness of proposed evaluation plan
- Past performance of experienced sponsors or re-competing grant programs
 - through a staff compiled report on
 - accomplishment of performance measures,
 - compliance with reporting requirements,
 - progress on sustainability and expectations of grantees relative to program age,
 - problems with implementation and operation (e.g., enrollment and retention, meeting match, monitoring issues requiring corrective actions).
 - review of program evaluation findings

Using the score and ranking from the peer review panel, the technical and re-compete assessment, and the Commission's priorities, the Task Force will adjust the final scores to reflect the complete assessment of each proposal. They will then make their recommendations for funding to the full Commission, which will vote on the Task Force recommendations.